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Emergency Board Approves Funding to Address Public Defense Crisis

The board also approved grant applications to support wildfire recovery, homeless youth, community safety and behavioral health crisis teams

SALEM – The Joint Legislative Emergency Board convened Friday to approve \$10 million in emergency funding to support defendants across the state who are currently unrepresented amid the ongoing public defense crisis.

“We have to make the public defense system work for Oregonians,” House Speaker Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis) said. “It remains unacceptable that any Oregonian lacks legal representation and that we have a system without effective legislative oversight. The Emergency Board acted thoughtfully and deliberately today in focusing on immediate crises. Now, we’ll move into the legislative session focused on making government work for all of Oregon.”

This comes after the Emergency Board in June [approved an additional \\$100 million](#) to help the agency address current public defender caseloads, while still pushing the Office of Public Defense Services (OPDS) to modernize its operations. Legislative leaders previously allocated \$12.8 million to OPDS to increase hiring of criminal defense attorneys to address the growing number of criminal defendants without legal counsel.

Additionally, Speaker Rayfield and President Courtney [formed](#) the Three Branch Workgroup with the executive and judicial branches in April to develop short-term and long-term solutions to reform the state’s public defense and public safety systems.

The Emergency Board also approved applications for grants related to major statewide needs, including wildfire preparedness and relief, supports for youth experiencing homelessness, energy planning, community safety efforts and behavioral health intervention.

“I’m proud of the work we did today,” Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem) said. “We made investments to help Oregonians. That’s what we are here to do.”

- Approved a \$17.4 million grant application for community wildfire defense and a \$6 million grant application for disaster relief from the US Forest Service.
- Increased the Other Funds expenditure limitation by \$9 million for the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) to spend funding related to the Interagency Agreement with Oregon Housing and Community Services for the Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program.
- Approved a \$5.5 million grant application for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) from the U.S. Department of Energy for energy planning, policy and program development work.
- Approved a federal grant application for \$3.1 million through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) for a State Crisis Intervention program to be used possibly for red flag law training, education, and public awareness initiatives; state crisis intervention specialized court-based programs; behavioral health deflection for at risk individuals; and law enforcement for safe security, storage, tracking and returning of relinquished firearms.
- Approved a \$250,000 grant application for the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) to enhance training for behavioral health mobile crisis teams.

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